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THE SONGS AND STORIES OF THE ALEUTS, WITH
TRANSLATIONS FROM VENIAMINOV.

FATHER VENIAMINOV says that in his day (1820-1840), and before, the Aleuts possessed many songs and much folk-lore. Besides those that were common to all, each village had an extensive repertoire of its own. During the three years that I spent among them I tried to gather some of their songs, but I was unable to do so, because those Aleuts with whom I came in contact knew them not. Of stories I got a mere handful. But I had access to two villages only, and I believe that in some of the outlying communities a great deal may yet be gathered.

Many of the songs came down from earlier days, when they were composed by the shamans. In more recent times, since the office of shaman has deteriorated, almost any Aleut thinks himself capable of making songs. The songs may be divided into several classes. There were those that dealt with their early history and the valiant deeds of their forefathers; others were strictly of a religious nature, and were employed on religious occasions only — such as the summoning of the spirits; then there were songs to accompany their scenic representations; and those also which dealt with their ordinary affairs of life.

The Aleut is rather a musical being. He loves to sing, and those who have heard the Aleuts sing in the Russian Church are much pleased. One, of course, must not lay too much stress on the terms music and song; for the former is of the simplest, having only about five whole notes, and the only musical instrument was a sort of a drum, which kept up the same beat all through the song, while the latter (song) lacked both rhythm and metre.

The stories, as noted above, were very numerous. Veniaminov, who heard many of them, divides them into three classes: (1) those that are purely narrative; (2) those with a purpose to "satirize" or moralize; and (3) mythological. He gives one of each class to illustrate the kind of stories. Besides the three given by Veniaminov and the few that I have succeeded in collecting, I do not believe there are any more recorded. I feel quite certain that I have not their best and most important stories; for, judging them by Veniaminov's, mine lack the poetic beauty and plot his have. He had been in every village, from Attu to Unga, and at a time when the Aleut still took pride in his native accomplishments.

It is a great pity and loss that no more of their songs and stories have been preserved, and that no attempt is made in that direction. Unlike the Kadiak stories that I have heard, the Aleutian stories are

realistic. They portray minutely the ways and customs of the people. The first of the Veniaminov stories is a very true picture of Aleutian life and ought to be read carefully line by line by those who wish to know their customs. Some of their stories are so real as to be brutal. I have not yet heard one their stories which could not have actually happened in their real life. Supernatural incidents come in, but only at the end of the story; it is as if the gods were called in to help out the story-teller when he gets into a tight place.

In conclusion I may say that each story had one or more songs to accompany it; but the modern Aleuts who still remember the stories have forgotten the song, and therefore none accompany the stories given here.

I. CHIEF AGITALIGAK.

One of the mightiest and best known of the Aleutian ancestors, by the name of Agitaligak, chief in the village Adus, situated on Unmak Island, tired of the ordinary affairs in his life, which he could carry on near his place and among his people, decided to crown himself and his people with glory by doing some memorable and glorious deed on foreign shores.

Having before him this high aim, he did not disclose his plans until winter, when he asked his hunters to join in the enterprise; and, as he was famous and mighty, a great number of warriors gathered about him. At a favorable time, taking their wives and children, they started on their journey towards the east in *bidarras* (large skin boats). While passing by Unalaska Island, a number of others joined in with them, also far-off relatives of the leader. Towards the end, Chief Agitaligak had the pleasure of seeing himself the leader and head of a large army of warriors and a great fleet, with which he proceeded from Unalaska, keeping along the eastern coast of the Alaskan Peninsula.

Before reaching the island of Kadiak, Agitaligak discovered two large bays, called in his language Kigágik Madgík, and Túgin Ikúchtak, which bays the chief thought favorably situated for villages, and therefore decided to remain there permanently; and, dividing his army into two parts, he designated a bay for each. The newcomers settled there, built two large villages (the westerly one being the home of Agitaligak), and, finding sufficient means for their maintenance, lived in peace and began to increase. Their occupation consisted mainly in hunting sea and land animals. The two villages had a compact between themselves, the violation of which was punishable by death, that, under no circumstances, except as guests, should the people of one village go to the other. Three years they lived in this manner, never going very far from their homes, and never being attacked nor meeting any unpleasantness from outsiders.

After three years, it happened that the settlers of the eastern village

sent two *bidarras*, with the full number of paddlers, to gather wood within the boundary of the western village (wood could have been got elsewhere), which was the special property of their chief, where he had gathered much wood. These, by coming here, broke the compact and oath with their neighbors (which forbade going on each other's side), but not only that, they even took the ready-cut wood and cut it to fit their boats; and only because darkness was approaching they decided to remain all night. Not expecting an attack from strangers, nor from their neighbors, who were their relatives, they took no precaution for the night.

Agitaligak, somehow finding out that strangers were in his possessions, sent messengers to learn what they were doing; they came back and reported that the wood, which, according to his orders, had been gathered and prepared, was all cut up and ready to be carried away in strange *bidarras*. He sent immediately a part of his warriors and ordered them to punish with death the breakers of the oath and thieves. They obeyed his orders, and left not a single man alive.

Chief Agitaligak had a son, Taiyaguch Kayulinach, who was already married, and (according to a primitive Aleutian custom) to a girl from the neighboring village; and as the girl had to stay until a certain time after marriage at the home of her father, and the time to move over to her husband's home had not yet arrived, Kayulinach could, and when he felt like it did, visit his young wife, and often spent several days with her.

Soon after the above-mentioned happening in the woods, Kayulinach asked his father for permission to go, as formerly, and visit his wife, who was about to make him a father (this event would strengthen the marriage bond and give him the right to take her home). His father, knowing that his action towards his neighbors could not remain unrevengeed, would not consent for a long time to his going, fearing that their revenge would be spent on him, his only heir. Finally, unable to withstand the pleadings of his beloved son, Agitaligak let him go, but on the condition that he should return, without fail, within ten days. Should he not return to him within that time, Agitaligak would consider him as dead, killed to avenge his deed.

Kayulinach alone departed immediately. On coming to the village where his wife lived he was met, not as before by all or at least a great part of the village, but by his wife's three brothers, who informed him that his father's doings were well known to the people, who were already planning how and by what means to repay him; and they advised him that, if either to-day or to-morrow he should be called to a public meeting, he should refuse to go; otherwise he could not avoid being killed. Kayulinach did not altogether appreciate their words of warning and advice; his mind was elsewhere, with his beloved wife who had just given

birth to a son (his heir), to whom he hurried. She also told him of the present state of feeling in the village, and begged him not to go; he, however, neglected her advice, thinking that no one would dare to harm him, the son of the mightiest and most renowned chief; and also because he was related to nearly every one in the village through his mother and his wife; but it all ended differently from what he had expected.

The day after Kayulinach came to the village he was invited, as anticipated, to the council, which was held in the open air outside of the village. He, receiving such an invitation, dressed himself without delay in his best *parka* and hat, etc., and, turning aside from the tearful pleadings of his wife, went where he was called. Coming out of the house into the open air, he stopped, and, turning his eyes in all directions, said: "This world will never darken, and it will never end; this wind will never altogether cease blowing and affect fiercely man and beast; (then looking on, the hills and mountains) and also the high beautiful earth will never change; but to all people and all other living creatures will come an end, and all will die; and I too will some day die, and why should I now fear a glorious death!"

Saying this, he went directly to the meeting place, and on reaching there walked right into the midst of them, and sat down in the centre. He was silent for a while, and seeing that no attempt was being made to question him, nor to greet him, he said to them: "Here, I have come to you; why did you call me?"

"We knew," they said, "that on account of your wife you would come to us; we expected and invited you here for no other purpose than to find out from you about the two *bidarras* which went from here to your side; have you not heard concerning them? did not one of your people happen to see where they went? If they are yet alive, they should have returned long ago; they had no danger to expect from any one on that side; for it is peopled by you, our relatives. Therefore, tell us the truth, everything that you know concerning them."

"Yes," he replied, "I saw your *bidarras* with the men, and I know what became of them; but you will be dishonored if you revenge so many warriors on me, a poor boy."

"We neither intend to revenge them on you, nor to harm you; tell us right out whether you saw them killed; tell us the truth."

He answered them as before. Then all present became angry and ferocious; and one of them, who was formerly a slave of Kayulinach's father, said: "What is the use of talking with him, and sparing him in your sorrow? See, he is only making fun of us; we ought to do something to him."

When the slave had spoken, one of Kayulinach's uncles said to the council, "Do with him what you like." They all agreed then that he ought to be killed. Every one of the warriors wished for the privilege

of executing the sentence, singly and without aid; because Kayulinach (as his name signifies) was a very powerful man, and to kill such a hero was a glorious deed. But they who desired that privilege paid dearly for it. The first rash man did not even come near Kayulinach; for he seized him, lifted him up in the air, twisted his head off, and cast him away. Seven others of his enemies and opponents, each stronger than the former one, shared the same fate. The Aleuts, seeing that if they permitted him to meet them singly he would twist off the head of every one of them, attacked him in a body with their spears; and the slave who first suggested that Kayulinach be killed was the first to thrust a spear through his heart, killing him.

Then the nearest relatives of the dead, *i. e.* his uncles and cousins, with weeping, took his corpse, and making a rich cradle (a skin-covered frame on which the dead were suspended), trimmed it with various trimmings, put him into it, and hung it under a *bidarra*. Kayulinach's wife wept inconsolably for him.

When the ten days within which Kayulinach had promised to return had passed, and he did not appear, his father immediately went in search of him to the village where he had gone. He arrived there in the night, and went to the house of his daughter-in-law, who in the darkness of the night sat and wept bitterly. Chief Agitaligak knew then that the weeping woman was his son's wife, and, going up to her, began in a low voice to question her: "Is your husband, Taiyaguch Kayulinach, dead?"

She, hearing such a question, and from a stranger, replied: "Did you come to laugh at me, and to add grief to my affliction; did you not see what happened to my husband to-day; were you not then with them?"

"Be quiet, speak low; I am the father of your husband; I came to inquire whether he is yet alive; come show me where the body of my son is."

The woman led him there where the body of her husband hung; and they both cried there a long time. Finally Agitaligak said to her: "Tell no one that I have been here; I will soon come again and avenge the death of my son with the blood of my relatives."

Saying this, he directly departed. Arriving home the following morning, he called his nephew (his sister's son) and all his other people, and sat him (nephew) in front of himself face to face, so near, that when he (Agitaligak) began to speak his saliva flew into the other's face; and in a very revengeful and savage voice began speaking to him: "Algichtayach! (the name of the nephew) you are a hunter, eager for war and thirsty for human blood. I have restrained you until now the present time; but now I give you full liberty; revenge the death of your cousin. Your brother and my son was killed in the village of his relatives; prepare yourself to wage war against our own people." When he had

finished, he gave orders to arm and be ready so soon as possible to start on the expedition.

His orders were obeyed, and the frenzied father advanced with his army without delay; and coming to the village at night, fell on his enemies and relatives, who were not expecting him, attacked them in their *barabaras*, and from this large village not a soul was left alive except his daughter-in-law and grandson, whom he took away with him, also the corpse of his son, and returned home.

Arriving home, he made a memorial feast in memory of his son; *i. e.* he ordered to place before the people all the eatables he had, and all who lived in the village came and ate all they wanted; and the father wept for his son. This memorial feast continued three days, then the chief gave orders that the body should be hung in his house in the same cradle in which he had lain at first; and he requested all the people that from this time forth they should neither beat the drum nor rejoice, in deference of his inconsolable grief. Neither time, nor hunting, nor tears, nor any diversion could lessen or lighten his bitter sorrow. Thinking he would find solace in killing his slaves, he ordered a big fire to be made, and when it was flaming he commenced to throw them in. But this expedient brought him no relief.

At last he decided to depart from his village, and with it leave his cherished aims and plans, *i. e.* to gain glory on foreign shores, and return to his native land; and the following summer he gathered all his surviving relatives, who were under him, and went back over the same course and to the same place from whence he started on his famous expedition, leaving behind all his valuables, houses, etc.

When he came home, he wept and grieved even more than before, both on account of his affliction and failure.

So, then, instead of achieving a memorable and famous deed and glorifying himself and his people, he only weakened himself, nearly all of his people being dead; and in place of honor and joy, he brought shame, sadness, grief, and tears, which did not leave him until his very end.

2. A STORY FOR HUSBANDS.

There was a certain merry Aleut, who was exceedingly fond of plays (evening gatherings, the usual time and ways of amusing themselves); and when present at such, would masquerade in various masks and dance. One time he decided to give a play (party) such as would astonish and arouse the envy of all. The preparations for this occasion were especially tiresome and of long duration, and when everything was ready he went to the different villages to invite guests. When the guests arrived they, as customary, encamped on the beach in their travelling tents. The impatient host could hardly wait till evening, and at the

proper time he sent his wife to bring the masks, while he commenced singing the songs which he had composed for this special occasion, and playing on the drum. It was already late, and still his guests did not come, neither did his wife bring the masks. He waited awhile, and then began singing and playing as before. In this manner he, being heated and in an ecstatic state, sang and played the whole night, entirely by himself. As it began to dawn, he came to himself and realized the situation; and a little later went out in the street, and what does he see? His guests had all gone home; and to his great shame they added the greatest insult in taking his young wife with them. The unfortunate play-lover tore off all the clothes and ornaments which he had on, put on shabby clothing, and for three days he neither ate nor drank. On the third day he was told that two *bidarkas* came from that village from whence his former guests were. He requested that the new-comers be invited to his house, and after seating them gave orders that they be treated with the best he had. When they commenced eating, he too began eating and drinking. While eating, he told them of his misfortune and grief, and then asked them whether they knew or had heard where they had taken his wife, and to which village. His guests told him that his wife was in their village, and was already married, living in the largest *barrabara*, situated in the very centre of the village, dressed always in her gala *parka*, and always painted; and in the middle of each day she sat near the fire sewing for her new husband a *kamalayka* from sea-lion's intestines. After thanking his guests for the information he dismissed them.

The following day he went to the village where his wife was, and found her in the very place and situation as his late guests had described to him. At that time all the men from the village were out hunting. He then, not saying a word, seized his wife by her long hair, dragged her outside, tore off her holiday attire, leaving her naked, and in this condition dragged and placed her in his *bidarka*. Bringing her home, he tied her outside the *barrabara*, at the entrance, and left her there in the same state (naked). In this condition and position he kept her three days, then pulled her inside and shut her in, in some kind of a storeroom for seven days, and still in the same state, while he himself sat near the entrance. There he sat for seven days without eating and drinking, neither did he appease the hunger and thirst of his wife. At the expiration of that time he went to sea to hunt, but before going he told his mother that in his absence she should wash his wife, dress, and feed her. Returning from the hunt in the evening, he went to his house and met his wife with such a face and expression as if nothing at all had happened, and began to live with her in peace and harmony, as formerly; but his passion for play turned to hate, and he became more careful and thoughtful on account of his wife.

This story is composed for the benefit of those who, being themselves the cause of the disobedience and unfaithfulness of their wives, throw the blame on them.

3. THE FIRST SEA-OTTERS.

On the southern side of Unalaska Island, opposite the present village of Chernovsky, there was once a village named Igagik. In that village lived a certain well known Aleut who had only two children, a son and a daughter. The son, when full grown, was a quick and bold hunter; and the daughter, who was just reaching womanhood, was a model in her way.

The parents and all other relatives could not rejoice sufficiently on looking on the young people, and considered themselves very fortunate; but a dreadful calamity, never heard of before nor since, befell them, and of a sudden destroyed their happiness.

When the girl reached puberty she (according to the primitive custom of the Aleuts) was placed in confinement in a small *barrabara*, and no one besides her servant was allowed to go near her. Her brother, about this time, used to go out nearly every night bird hunting.

While yet in seclusion, and at night when the fire was already out, a certain young man commenced to visit the girl, and passionately made illicit proposals; she, fearing to disgrace her relations, would by no means consent. Finally, not being able to obtain his end by fair means, the young man obtained it by force. The girl, dishonored, determined to revenge herself, and she did it in a most cruel and degrading way. When leaving the *barrabara* (through a hole in the roof) the girl cut the sinews of both his legs right under the knees, and the unhappy youth, moaning, crawled away from there.

The following morning the girl's parents sent to tell her that her beloved brother, while out hunting on the preceding night, fell on sharp rocks, cutting the sinews of his legs, and died immediately. This terrible news threw the girl for a short time into some kind of a stupor. She then ordered the servant to dress her in her very best clothes, *i. e.* to put on her the necklace, the bracelets, the earrings, the nose ornaments (made of wood), and to paint her cheeks; then she herself put on her very best *parka* (trimmed with fur seal and bills of small ducks, etc., and which is sewed like a long shirt without an opening in front) and tore it in front from top to bottom. Dressed in this fashion, she went, followed by her servant, to her father's house, where her dead brother lay.

Her brother was really dead, and lay on the floor in the front part of the *barrabara*, his parents and friends around him weeping and lamenting. Instead of mourning, she began to sing a song in a very joy-

ful strain: "You brother, brother of mine, come get up, get up and look on that on whose account you have deprived yourself of sleep!"

While singing this song she approached the corpse, shaking the folds of her torn *parka* and uncovering herself. When she had approached her brother in this manner his toes began to move; as she repeated her song and dance a second time the color came into his face; and at the end of the third performance he jumped up and tried to embrace her. She escaped him and ran outside, he after her, and after him his astonished parents and friends. The girl ran in such a way that her reanimated brother could not reach her, neither could his pursuers come up with him. At last, driven to the clifly beach, and seeing no other way of escape, they threw themselves into the sea.

Their pursuers waited a long time, not taking their eyes off the spot, and, as it were, waiting for them to emerge. After a long time they appeared on the surface and were even alive; not as human beings, however, but as otters, and slowly swam from the shore, one going east, the other west. The broken-hearted parents followed their course with their eyes, crying and saying: —

"You children, our children, was it for this that we nursed and reared you, that you should shame us with your guilt, and that you should become wild beasts! We were hoping that you would support and bring peace and happiness to us," etc.

In this manner did the parents mourn for their children all their lives; and from that time appeared in the sea sea-otters.

4. "KÚGÀN AGALIK," THE APPEARANCE OF THE DEVILS.

(Translated from Veniaminov.)

The primitive Aleuts had a very effectual way of impressing on their wives the benefits of obedience and faithfulness, and training their daughters in the virtues and proper ways of life. They accomplished these objects by means of a play, which was unlike any of their other plays, or a shaman play. It was known as "Kúgàn Agalik" ("the appearance of the devils"). The mysteries of the play were known to the men only, who, under the penalty of death, guarded them secretly, and were not allowed to disclose them to their wives, mothers, or sweet-hearts. A traitor had to suffer violent death, and that inflicted by his nearest blood relative. When of age the young men were initiated into its mysteries either by their fathers or uncles. It was not until the advent of Christianity that the women discovered how badly imposed upon they had been.

The play was performed in the following manner: When the Aleuts decided or saw the need of performing it, they, in good time, assigned to all and each parts and places of action. On the morning of the day when the play was to be given, a part of the men, assigned to play the

rôle of the devils, left the village for a couple of days or more, pretending they were going hunting; and those who remained at home, when it was getting late, became all of a sudden restless, frightened, watchful, making believe that they had a foreboding of a calamity near at hand. In this way the men frightened the women, who were not permitted to leave the *barrabara* lest some harm befall them.

Shortly after the first fright and while in this condition, a loud and unusual noise outside was heard; and one of the brave men was sent out to investigate. He had not been out more than a moment before he came running back in great terror and consternation, saying: "The devils will soon appear." He had scarcely done, when from all sides outside there arose terrible knockings and noises, so that it seemed the *barrabara* would crumble to pieces, and in addition to this there were ravings and awful shrieks in a strange voice. Then all the men of the *barrabara* would gather and place themselves in a defensive position, and cry to each other: "Stand up to it; be firm; don't give up!" While in this mental state, the terrible devil, so tall that he could barely stand up in the *barrabara*, and dressed in a grassy suit, came in view and with dreadful roaring and whistling dropped into the *barrabara* through the opening in the ceiling. "Quickly put out the light!" all the men yelled, and that done the shrieking, whistling, howling, knocking, and all the other frightful noises increased. The devil was surrounded and attacked. "Wrestle; beat him; drive him out!" the chief shouted to his men. With each order the tumult swelled; in addition, strange cracking, breaking, groaning, in fact all conceivable noises filled the air. This fight and excitement lasted for a time, until the devil was overpowered and driven out, followed by the men yelling and screaming; but gradually the noise subsided, and then ceased altogether. A little later the devil-drivers returned to the *barrabara*, and after lighting the fires, looked about to see if any of their own men were hurt or missing, and nearly always there was somebody missing. On discovering this fact a new uproar arose: "Quickly get a woman for an offering, for a ransom for the kidnapped one!" and seizing the woman decided upon previously, and who was in a semi-conscious or unconscious state, rushed out with her. After a little time the men returned, carrying the missing man, who was apparently dead; the woman was also brought back, with honor. Then followed the resurrection of the dead man, which was effected by beating him with inflated bladders, and calling to him: "Arise, you are now with us." Little by little he would revive, and become conscious again. His relatives, then, gave him to the woman who redeemed him from the devil with her person. With this the performance ended.

A few days later returned the departed hunters, who were informed of the devil's appearance, of the man's abduction and his redemption.

The hunters listened to it with unusual attention and fright. As the belief of the Aleuts was wrapped up in spirits and devils, it is not to be wondered that the women were in constant dread of them, and on that account were more obedient and faithful than they would have been otherwise.

F. A. Golder.

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